

# THE MILLSTONE

KURRAJONG ~ COMLERoy HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Society is dedicated to researching, recording, preserving and promoting the history of the district. Covering the area west of the Hawkesbury River - North Richmond, Kurrajong, Berambing, Bilpin, Grose Vale, Bowen Mountain, Colo, Wilberforce, Ebenezer, Glossodia, Tennyson, Freemans Reach.

## GROSE VALE SCHOOL – A HISTORY OF MANY BUILDINGS

by Deborah Hallam

The earliest schools in the colony of NSW were mainly Religious or Denominational Schools. The Kurrajong area was no different and it's generally accepted that the first such schools were the Catholic Parochial School, on the site that is now St Gregory's Catholic Church and the Anglican Denominational School on the corner of Bells Line and Hermitage Road. These schools commenced operation in 1834 and 1836 respectively.

What is less well known is the existence of another Anglican Denominational school at South Kurrajong on what is now Grose Vale Road.

In 1843, or thereabouts Richard Skuthorp, donated 1 rood, 16 perches of land for a Church of England Denominational School near Pine Place. The school opened in 1845 and a teacher's residence was erected adjacent. Unfortunately, Skuthorp neglected to register the donation - a situation that became relevant when the Public Schools Act of 1866 abolished the Denominational Schools and placed them under the control of the newly established Council of Education. The Denominational School was closed and the residents of South Kurrajong began to push for a new school.

In August 1871 Kurrajong South Public School was established with Miss Knightly appointed as the teacher.

Thus, on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1873 the trustees for Richard Skuthorp Snr, were obliged to negotiate the transfer of said land from James Skuthorp, to whom it had been legally transferred to the trust for the sum of 10/-. Three years later the trustees transferred the land to the Council of Education for £30.

Two issues became serious problems for the school. The first

of these being that, owing to the rather isolated location, there was no interaction with the community or general public, which supposedly resulted in very poor student results in official inspections and tests. Secondly, although the old school rooms and teacher's residence had been rebuilt in 1880, the buildings became unserviceable due to extensive white ant activity which required frequent repairs. The residence was too small for a family.

In 1898 a site was chosen for a new school and 1 acre 2 roods 11 perches were resumed from the "Wynbah" property. Unfortunately, the chosen site had no access to the public road and it became necessary to purchase extra land from Richard Skuthorp, Jr. Total cost £81.10.4d for both properties. The old school site was sold to Horace Dunston for £76. The new school was occupied in May, 1899 although a new residence was not constructed until 1906.

On 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1944 the school (renamed Grose Vale School in 1929), residence and weather-shed were destroyed by fire. Early the following year a large one-pole tent was erected for use as a school room. A new school building was erected in 1945.

In 1976 a new school, Grose View, was opened on Grose Wold Road to replace both Grose Vale and Grose Wold schools. In 1980 the old Grose Vale schoolroom became home to the Grose Vale Scouts. However, this too is no longer in use, as the Scouts moved to Mill Road in 2018.



The 1945 Grose Vale School building on the lane just west of Cabbage Tree Road. Photo taken in 2016 Image 163306. Photo Paul Hulbert

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## President's Report

Hello everyone,

At the end of April we ventured west for our Goldfields Tour. There is a full report on Page 4. It was a very enjoyable trip and thanks to Frank Holland for planning it, even though several establishments tried to thwart his plans by not being open as advertised! Suggestions for next year?

On Saturday 15th a small group braved the winter chill for a walking tour of Green Hills (Windsor), capably guided by Dr Jan Barkley-Jack. It was quite worthwhile.

Our Mid Winter Dinner will be a lunch event held at the newly renovated Kurrajong Heights Bowling Club on Monday 22nd July. The guest speaker will be Michael Thomson and his topic is *Canberra and the Burley Griffins*.

We are pleased to welcome Bendigo Bank as a Millstone sponsor. Bendigo Bank has been taking care of our accounts for many years.

As many of you know, our Millstone Editor, Suzanne Ballard-Smith has been having a bad run health-wise lately. I have edited the last three Millstones, ably assisted by Jenny, and Suzanne has now indicated she would like more time off to recover her health, so for now you've got me as the editor.

Back in April we (and many other organisations) received a letter from the ATO advising that from July we will have to submit a 'Not For Profit—Self Assessment Review'. At first we thought it was going to be just another piece of paperwork we have to submit, but as the buzz from other groups increased, we delved deeper into it and it seems that none of the categories offered for tax exemption covers historical societies and therefore we will not be able to claim NFP Take Exempt status, ie we will have to pay income tax. We have contacted the ATO, RAHS, ACNC and others for advice but it is all still up in the air. We have also contacted Susan Templeton (our local federal MP).

Please note that membership is **now due**. Any member who joined since March is financial until June 2025. Thank you to those who have already renewed.

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### 2024-25 Membership Renewal

Membership renewals are now due.

Adults \$20, Family \$30

Please go [online](#) and choose one of the many payment options.

### KURRAJONG – COMLEROY HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Content does not necessarily represent or reflect the views or opinions of K-CHS, its committee and members.

Every effort is taken to ensure accuracy of articles. If errors are found feedback is welcome.

[secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au](mailto:secretary@kurrajonghistory.org.au)

Erratum: Wheeny Creek was spelt with an extra 'e' in the Kurrajong Race Club article in previous edition.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Lynn Becker

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### James Comrie of NORTHFIELD, KURRAJONG HEIGHTS (Part 3) by Deborah Hallam

James Comrie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in May 1816, arriving in the colony of NSW in June 1843 on the *Emma* to take up a position of General Merchant at Moore's (later Millers Point) wharf.

Although raised Presbyterian, he joined the Pitt Street Congregational Church. During the 1850s he became well-known in the Sydney Business community as a shareholder and auditor of a number of development and banking companies as well as being appointed Justice of the Peace and a member of the Police Court. In 1856 he was appointed to the Legislative Council of NSW.

Sophia Louisa Jennings (1813-1895) had arrived in Van Diemens Land in 1832 and in 1836 married successful grazier, Phillip Russell, who died in 1844 leaving her wealthy. Moving to Sydney in 1847 she met Comrie at the Congregational Church and they were married in October 1847. Their only child was to be a stillborn daughter.

In 1856 James' began to feel the effects of ill health and looked to find an estate for his retirement. On 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1856 James Comrie purchased from Samuel North for the sum of £625, *Northfield* of 320 acres, *Amyville* of 50 acres and the 100 acres originally granted to Lewers. Also included were lots 42, 48 and 49 of the village of *Northfield*, part of Orr Douglass's original *Orrville* grant.

The Comries settled into the cottage at *Northfield* and set about extending and upgrading Samuel North's gardens and orchards. A report in the Sydney Morning Herald of 26 November 1868 describes the property.

*As I sat on my horse in the open meadow land, within which stand Mr Comries's house and gardens, I could not help being forcibly struck with the grandeur of the scene.*

*To the left was Northfield House, with its flower garden full of the choicest flowers and below me were the fruit gardens, orangeries and orchards, in which the productions of England and of Australia were obviously blended with a profusion that had a novel and splendid effect. Below the orchards and kitchen gardens were more fields of bright green grass.*

Similarly, the Town and Country Journal 13 May 1871 describes the house and garden with entry through an avenue, three quarters of a mile long through a natural forest.

*The cottage is a well-built structure, with spacious verandah and picturesque porches, and dormer windows. In the front of the house the spacious porch is*

*intertwined with luxurious growing cloth-of-gold rose and wisteria.*

Following a further description of the adjacent flower gardens and Italian style terraces surrounded by graceful shrubs and stately trees, there is a description of mountain walks constructed by Comrie.

A general description gives us an estate of 500 acres of which the 100 acres of the mountain summit had been cleared. The gardens and walkways around the house occupied 10 acres. Other structures not mentioned here included workers cottages, stables and the coach house.

While horticultural pursuits were his main interests at Kurrajong Heights, James was involved with St David's Presbyterian Church, constructed in 1868 although never taking on an official role. Comrie also retained a close friendship with Frederick Barker, Bishop of Sydney, who had been a neighbour during their residence in Sydney. It would seem that as a result of the friendship, Barker was the first visitor to the new owners of the *Northfield* estate and received the gift of the 11 acre Allotment 48 of Northfield Village to St Catherine's College at Waverly in 1861.

Comrie's well known philanthropy and the expenses of *Northfield* would not have been possible without the contribution of Sophia who on marriage retained a large part of her wealth by Deed of Settlement. Sophia was involved in a wide variety of charities independent of James' interests.

Sophia died at *Northfield* on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1895 followed by James on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1902. They are buried at Rookwood Cemetery.



*Mr James and Mrs Sophia Comrie posing on their lawn. Circa late 1800s Image 041900*

## Goldfields Tour 29th April - 2nd May *Report by Peta Smith*

After several long road work delays on Bells Line of Road, we meet up at The Harvest Cafe and Tourist Information Centre in Bathurst. Very nice coffee and the staff in the information centre are worth seeking out as they really know the area.

We travelled along Turondale Road stopping at the bridge over the Turon River.



*Hallam's Morgan on Turon River bridge*

Arriving at Hill End we stopped at Northey's pub for lunch. We managed to contact Malcolm, the owner of History Hill Museum, and he would open if we had ten people or more. Not a problem, we invited others who were having lunch at the hotel.

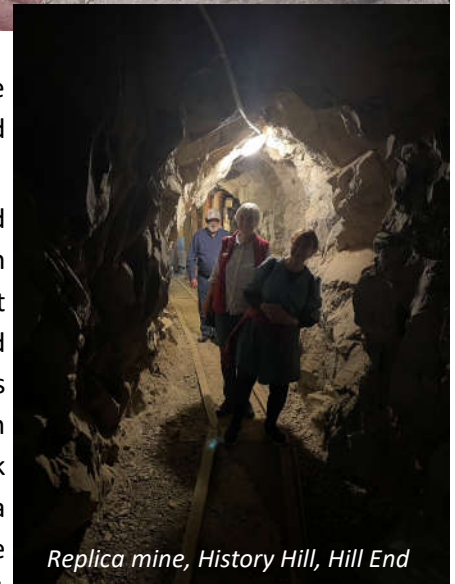
After lunch we started exploring the town of Hill End which is a former gold rush mining town. In 1872 Bernhardt Holtermann discovered a rock weighing 630 lbs of which 75% of its weight was gold. The Hill End population peaked at 8000. The town had two newspapers, five banks, eight churches and twenty eight pubs. As gold finds declined so did the population and it became virtually a ghost town. By 1945 the population was 700. By 2006 the population had dropped to 160 and in 2017 the residents numbered 80. The town is now heritage listed and its past preserved as witness to the gold rush era. History Hill Museum was a maze of artefacts of the gold rush days and mining. You could get lost for hours walking around the museum. Several of us walked into a mining tunnel recreated by Malcolm and a few of us exited by seven levels of narrow wooden ladders, others retreated from whence they came.

We stayed at Hill End Lodge a short distance from the town. Jon the owner had numerous pets and wild birds and roos visiting; the goose was a bit of a character with



an aggressive streak, as David discovered.

**Day 2** We stopped at Sofala. The town was a direct result of Edward Hargraves discovering gold in Summer Hill Creek in 1851. Sofala flourished until the alluvial gold ran out



*Replica mine, History Hill, Hill End*

and the mining switched to quartz reef mining. The town's population today is approximately 200. Sofala claims it is the oldest surviving gold town. There are still a few remaining buildings from its heyday.

Next stop was Kandos, originally spelt 'Candos', an acronym for Lime and Coal Company board members: Campbell, Angus, Noyes, Danger, Ogden, Stewart. The 'C' was replaced in 1915 by the Post Master General, as he deemed the name to be too similar to the town named Chandos in S.A. Kandos is a town of many concrete structures. The cement was of the highest quality and was used in the building of Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House

The railway was a necessity to transport the cement. The station was operational from 1914. The passenger service ceased in 1985 and freight in 2004. Through the advocacy of Kandos Museum, today the 8 kilometres of track is operational between Kandos and Rylestone for heritage trains and tourism only. The Limestone and

Coal Company was registered in May 1913. The cement works closed in September 2011 and the underground mine in March 2014

The Rylstone railway was built by Neils Hertzberg Larson (who changed his name to Peter Lawson) and his son, future poet Henry Archibald Hertzberg Lawson, in 1894. Rylstone station was a milestone in the building of the Gwabergar line.

Lunch was had at the Globe Hotel, which was once owned by a relative of Valerie Holland. Each heritage building had a sign telling you about its history.

We then went to the Cottage Museum, originally the home of blacksmith James Nash, built circa 1890. The Rylstone Historical Society rescued the building in 1984 and moved it to its current site. It was restored and opened in 1988 as the Cottage Museum.

Our next overnight stay was in Gulgong. En route to our destination we stopped in Lue to enjoy the sight of many goats. We looked at the abandon Lue Railway Station, the Hotel Lue and the building that once housed a Butcher, Draper and Grocer.

**Day 3** We started at the top of Gulgong, at the Peter Hardy Library Book Nook. In front of this building is a Bills' water trough and a mile post with a dedication to Peter Hardy. Peter was an Australian actor, theatre performer and musician who had a great love of his book collection which is now housed there, to be enjoyed by the residents and anyone who wants to read.

Next place of interest we visited was the 'Prince of Wales Opera House', for the price of a gold coin donation. The opera house was erected by John Hart Cogdon in 1871. Performances and silent movies were shown. The advent of TV saw the building left empty and derelict. In 1974 The Musical and Dramatic (MAD) Society "took the hat around" and raised enough money to purchase the theatre and over the next 25 years has restored the theatre. On its walls are the stories of the



Prince of Wales Opera House, Gulgong

numerous businesses that once occupied it. The MAD now holds three performances per year.

Gulgong does not disappoint the tourist. Just a few buildings down is the Bernhart Holterman Collection. It is a photographic history of the Hill End goldfields and its residents in 1872. Henry Beaufort Merlin and Charles Bayliss went on to photograph Gulgong and Mudgee goldfields. In 2013 the glass plate negatives were included in the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

After lunch we went on to the Pioneer Museum, a vast collection of Australian history occupying a whole block. You name it and they probably have it. Hours are needed to fully explore this collection.

Unfortunately I am old enough to have seen many things operational in my Nanna's home, some in the house I grew up in, in offices and on the roads. If you go to Gulgong take a drive up Bayly Street where there are several interesting church buildings. St Luke's is of particular interest. A romanesque, gothic revival church designed by architect Edmund Blacket in 1876. Built out of local stone at the cost of 650 pounds and has an interesting wooden bell tower with the still working bell surround by lattice.

Our last stop was Flirtation Hill Lookout [*Love the name.* *ed*] for a 360 degree view of Gulgong and its surrounding countryside.

On to Mudgee where most of the group visited Mudgee Museum, which also has an impressive collection. We stayed in Mudgee overnight with a very nice meal in Club Mudgee and then on to Portland the next day.



Portland Cement Works silo artwork

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5

**Day 4** Portland was our last stop before heading home. Portland is known as the town that built Sydney. This small town tucked away just outside Lithgow did not disappoint. Portland has a population of 2424. The now closed Blue Circle Cement works operated from 1902 – 1991. On the four remaining silos there is the mural artwork by Guido Van Helten depicting five men and one woman who once worked at the Portland Cement Works.



Also on the grounds are the original brick bottle kilns. We were lucky to meet Ant, who runs a gym in one of the old buildings. He took us around the grounds and told us of its history.

We then walked around the streets looking at the street art by the “Wallnuts” depicting life in Portland and advertisements of yesteryear. In 2001 sign writer Ron Bidwell came up with the idea of recreating vintage signs from 1895-1960. The last weekend in October each year they gather and paint.



The Coronation Hotel was a real find. Great atmosphere, good food, great service and a coal fire with dogs lounging in front of it. An excellent end to our trip.



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## 1872—an important year *by Patricia O'Toole*

During 1872 quite a few happenings had a significant effect on the future of Australia. The Overland Telegraph put the country in touch with the world. There were rich gold finds at Hill End with the commencement of underground reef mining. The Holtermann Nugget, was discovered. Beaufort Merlin photographed every day life in Hill End and other gold mining settlements near Bathurst. Merlin and wealthy Holtermann planned an exhibition to show Australia to the world.

After John McDouall Stuart's successful crossing from Adelaide to Darwin in 1862 people became enthusiastic about building a telegraph line across the continent to link with the overseas cable from Java (Indonesia) at Darwin. The South Australian Government agreed to fund the construction and on 22 August 1872 the job was complete.

The line was 3,200 kms long, had 36,000 telegraph poles and 11 repeater stations. These were set up to boost the signals and required people to live on site. Sites chosen had a good water supply and included Alice Springs, Daly Waters and Tennant Creek. With the completion of the undersea cable in December 1872 Australia connected with the world and messages could be sent in hours instead of months.

By 1872 alluvial gold at Hill End was all but gone so underground reef mining commenced. Bernhardt Otto Holtermann's mine *Star of Hope* in Hawkins Hill, yielded the largest nugget ever found. It weighed 286kgs and stood almost as tall as a man.



Around this time a photographer, Henry Beaufort Merlin, visited Hill End and nearby gold settlements. He came to Australia with his mother in 1848 and worked as a travelling theatrical showman. In 1865, he

opened a photographic studio and became a successful travelling landscape photographer. In 1869 he formed the American and Australasian Photographic Company. The company grew rapidly and pushed the boundaries of photographic technology. However, in 1872 Merlin resigned as manager and headed for the newly discovered goldfields of Hill End, Tambaroora and Gulgong.

With his assistant, Charles Bayliss, they photographed the townships and their people, as well as the surrounding areas.

During 1872 Merlin met wealthy prospector, Bernhardt Holtermann and a partnership to advertise Australia to the world by projecting transparent pictures was formed. With Holtermann's support photographing Hill End and the other gold settlements continued.



A magnificent panorama of Sydney was taken from Holtermann's North Sydney home. However, with the sudden death of Merlin in 1873 the expo didn't go ahead and it can be assumed the glass plates became the property of Bernhardt Holtermann. They remained lost and forgotten for almost 80 years.

In 1951 Keast Burke, editor of Kodak's *Australasian Photo-Review*, inquired through Mitchell Library staff as to the whereabouts of Holtermann's panorama. On their suggestion a visit to the family home at Chatswood yielded a treasure trove of some 3,500 glass plates. They had been stored in a garden shed for 80 years and were still in perfect condition. In 1953 Bernhardt Holtermann's grandson, Bernhard, donated them to the Mitchell Library and they became known as the Holtermann Collection.

The plates were identified and printed but it wasn't until technology enabled high resolution scanning that the detail in the glass plates could be fully appreciated. The State Library NSW has made the collection available online. The preservation of Hill End became possible because of the photographs.

With such wealth from goldmining, telegraphic contact with the world and belief in the future such as displayed by Holtermann and Merlin, it was time for an Australian stock exchange. It opened in Sydney in 1872.

Reference & Photos: Mitchell Library - State Library of NSW

*Left: Bernhardt Otto Holtermann with his nugget*

*Top: Clarke St, Hill End, looking north from All Nations Hotel*

Dates for Your DIARY

**K-CHS MID WINTER LUNCH  
KURRAJONG HEIGHTS  
BOWLING CLUB**

**Monday 22nd July 2024 at 12:30**

The guest speaker will be Michael Thomson and his topic is *Canberra and the Burley Griffins*.

**Two course lunch Members \$40 - Guests \$43**

[Please book online](#)

**K-CHS AGM**

**MON 23RD SEPTEMBER  
19:00 (7PM)**

**ST DAVID'S CHURCH,  
KURRAJONG HEIGHTS**

Guest speaker to be advised



Richmond Council Chambers, opened in 1940, is decorated for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953. The Richmond Borough Council had been formed in 1872. This building is now the library opposite the Richmond School of Arts.

Image 131071



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Our correspondent who visited Kurrajong last week reports that the farmers there are in want of rain. They have had scarcely any for sixteen months. Notwithstanding this the orangeries on the whole look well, particularly those of Mr. Holdsworth's, under the charge of Mr. Arkenstall. Mr. Bichard Ezzey's, the Rev. W. Scott's, and Mr. Barnard's, the two latter under the management of Mr. Henry Peck, look really splendid. Some trees there, loaded with fruit, will bear comparison with any in Australia. A box of oranges since sent to our office from Mr. Barnard's, contained some delicious fruit, and amongst them was one magnificent branch of thirty oranges.

*Australian Town & Country Journal 7th Sept, 1872*

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